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THE GLACIAL INTERPRETATION OF THE MAIN RIGVEDA MYTH AND THE PROBLEM OF INDO-EUROPEAN HOMELAND

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Abstract

The paper focuses on the study of the main Indo-Iranian myth attested in the Rigveda — that of the struggle between the solar god and the rocky snake. It has long been proposed to interpret the battle between Indra and Vala–Vritra as the glaciological event evidenced by the Vedic seers — the last series of Holocene transgression and regression of the mountain-like and especially snake-like glaciers of the Himalayas and the Hindu Kush. The scholarly approach required solid base of factual data to make this interpretation a scientific theory. This base has been obtained recently through the analysis of soil samples from under the moraines of Pakistan, India and Nepal dating two last glacial transgressions of the Himalayan and the Hindu Kush mountains around 6100–6000 and 3600–3300 B.C. This dating corresponds to the cultural vocabulary of the Indo-Europeans, the Avesta evidence, archaeology of South Asia and the agrarian peculiarities of Afghanistan–Punjab region where this main Indo-Iranian myth has been formed. Thus the composition of the Rigveda hymns between 3300 and 2600 B.C. and the localization of the Indo-European homeland at the junction of Iran and Hindustan have been again proved.

Keywords: Indo-Europeans, Indo-Aryans, Iranians, Rigveda, Avesta, glaciers.

I. INTRODUCTION

L. D. Kalla places the ancestral home of the Indo-Europeans on the southwestern slopes of the Himalayas (in the Seven-Rivers'-Land or Sapta Sindhu) (Kalla, 1930. P. 51). According to the Rig Veda (The Rigveda, 2014; Rigveda, 2021) after repeatedly killing Vritra ("Having smashed Vritra, he set loose the rivers, welcomed [/gurgling] through many dawns and autumns. Indra drilled out the streams, which had been surrounded and hard pressed, to flow along the earth" (IV.19.8)) in the mountains, Indra releases rivers swallowed or dammed by the snake to flow (into the ocean) (I.32.1–2, 8; I.51.4; I.52.2; I.57.6; I.61.10, 12; II.11.2; II.14.2; II.19.2; III.32.6, 11; IV.16.7; IV.17.1, 3, 7; IV.18.7; IV.19.2–5; IV.22.7; V.29.2; V.32.1–2; VI.17.12; VI.20.2; VI.30.3–5; VII.21.3; VIII.3.10; VIII.6.13; VIII.12.26; VIII.89.4; X.113.6; X.133.2).

These are the rivers of India: "The waters stood still – their husband was the Dasa; their herdsman, the serpent – hemmed in like the cows by the Pani. What was the hidden opening for the waters – that Indra uncovered after he smashed Vritra. You, Indra, then... conquered the cows... You set loose the seven rivers to flow. [– here and further, when mentioning seven streams/rivers, there is Sapta Sindhu in the original. – A.S.]"



(I.32.11–12). "Who, having smashed the serpent, let flow the seven rivers, who drove away the cattle by uncovering Vala... – he, o peoples, is Indra" (II.12.12). "Forth from the lap of the mountains, eager, racing with each other like two mares unloosed, resplendent, licking each other like mother cows (their calves), the Vipash and Shutudri (rivers) [– the Bias and the Sutelj. – A.S.] speed with their milk. Impelled by Indra as you long to take part in the forward thrust, you drive like two charioteers to the sea, clashing together, swelling with your waves, the one of you merges into the other – you resplendent ones... Indra with the mace in his arms dug us channels: he smashed away Vritra [/the obstacle] surrounding the rivers... This act of heroism is to be proclaimed ever anew, the deed of Indra when he hewed apart the serpent. He smashed apart the enclosures with his mace. The waters went seeking a way to go" (III.33.1–2, 6–7). "Indra made the waters flow for Manu. He smashed the serpent; he let the seven rivers stream. He opened them up, like holes that had been covered over" (IV.28.1). "You let loose the rivers that had been swallowed by the serpent. Right after that they roiled forth at speed those seeking release and those that had been released. Then they did not rest, once pointed down. Converging, they went to the river [Sindhu – i.e. the Indus. – A.S.]" (X.111.9–10).

According to P. T. Iyer "this serpent Vritra was glacier ice... Vipash and Shutudri were the two rivers Beas and Sutelj... they were fed by snow and ice... glaciers obstruct the course of the Sutelj and other Himalayan rivers... the glaciers of the Himalayas came down to much lower levels during times not far removed from us... the serpent-surrounder of the waters must be glacier ice... How appropriate was the name the ancient Rishis invented for the glacier! Coldblooded, swallowing its prey in its jaws, creeping tortuously on its belly like a python, its back set with bands transverse and longitudinal, tapering towards the end as it descends to the lower regions, swallowing its victim alive and entire and digesting it leisurely and laboriously, adjusting itself to the varying width of the valley, with wide-opened jaws at the head of the valley known to modern science as the bergschrund and named by the Rishis Ahirbudhnya, the normal glacier is a python or serpent... Rishis... lived during the glacial period, saw the dread serpents creeping down the valleys, freezing life and sunlight out of the habitable surface of the earth, survived the crisis, and witnessed the destruction of the serpents and the creation of light and life out of the chaos of debris and waters resulting from that destruction. I must add some description to show what sort of castles (Puras) they were in which the serpents were entrenched... Round Vritra were precipitous walls which kept out the sun, carved into many a castellated tower, bastion, and battlement, a vast fortification from which rocks and stones were shot out which are food and armour to Vritra, but death to life. And then there were the lateral moraines, the medial moraines which in a many-headed dragon might reach a hundred as in the case of Dasa Shambara, and the terminal moraine with its arched ice-cave (Udavraja), some of them hundreds of feet high. Thus entrenched and defended, overlaid with tough stony till and crammed with slippery stones and boulders, the insatiate coiler challenged Indra to do his worst" (Iyer, 1911. P. 3–5 & 32–33).

As per D. S. Chauhan «the Vedic sages experienced the life and death of the river system which they loved most due to long spell of glaciation (ice age) and warming. They expressed it in terms of the periodic war between Indra and Vritra war (RV. 1:32:10-13; 1:54:10; 2:30:3). The frozen rivers (glaciers) occupying zig-zag passages were visualised as the great serpent 'Vritra', who withheld water, and the Sun god 'Indra', who released the water. The tussle between this natural phenomenon [so in the text. — A.S.] of freezing and thawing of water was described as a war between the two... The warm spell that immediately followed the last ice age at the threshold of the Holocene around 10,000 yr. BP. This is implied from Indra–Vritra war widely quoted in Rig Veda (RV. 1.32.10-13; 1.54.10; 2.30.3 and others). The war is an expression of the break-up of glaciers and deglaciation» (Chauhan, 1999. P. 37 & 43).

II. METHODOLOGY

The study combines the exploration of the textually attested mythological, linguistic, archaeological and botanical data from the point of view of the glacial interpretation of the main Indo-Iranian myth most prominently expressed in the Rigveda (3300–2600 B.C.) and the Avesta. Thus, the article has an interdisciplinary character.



III. DISCUSSION AND RESULTS

In the neoglacial with the shift to the south of the northern border of the forest around the world and the cooling of the Arctic waters, the growth of glaciers began from 4000 B.C. calibrated in the Alps, the Pyrenees, Scandinavia and the Cascade Mountains and several centuries later — in the Caucasus, Patagonia, New Zealand and the Himalayas (Solomina, 2007. P. 173). According to the analysis of 69 samples of soils buried in the moraines of Pakistan, India and Nepal, the expansion of the glaciers of Tibet and the Himalayas is dated to ~6100–6000 and 3600–3300 (C14 calibrated) B.C. (Solomina, 2007. 169 & 171–172). The Indo-Europeans as a community appeared in the Eneolithic and conducted an agricultural and cattle-breeding economy (Mallory, 1997. P. 100; Mallory & Adams, 2006. P. 134–141, 163–169 & 241). This corresponds to the archaeological evidence from Hindustan. The oldest producing economy in South Asia has so far been identified in Baluchistan on the right bank of the Indus (late VIII Millennium B.C.: barley, wheat, zebu, goats and sheep) (Mukherjee, 2001. P. 127–128; Shaffer & Lichtenstein, 2005. P. 82; Possehl, 2007. P. 455–456; Jarrige, 2008. P. 141–143), at Bhirrana-on-Saraswati in Fatehabad District in Haryana (the middle of VIII Millennium B.C: zebu, buffalo, goat, sheep, wheat, barley, pulses) (Rao et al, 2005. P. 67; Sahu, 2015. P. 25–26; Dikshit, 2013. P. 131–132; Deshpande-Mukherjee, Sen, Rao, 2016. P. 248–256, 260) and on the northern slopes of Vindhya and the neighboring Ganga–Yamuna plain (the middle of VIII Millennium B.C: rice, barley, wheat) (Sharif & Thapar, 1996. P. 150–151; Mukherjee, 2001. P. 128–129; Tewari, 2008. P. 364–370; Misra, 2008. P. 25–27; Varma, 2008. P. 34–40 & 42–46; Pal, 2008. P. 265–268, 272 & 277). Crucibles of various sizes with specks of molten copper still sticking to them suggesting smelting of copper between 7500 and 6000 B.C. were detected in Bhirrana (Rao et al, 2005. P. 61; Rao et al., 2006. P. 46; Deshpande-Mukherjee, Sen, Rao, 2016. P. 250), also two small copper rods (Rao et al, 2004. P. 21), a copper bangle (Rao et al., 2006. P. 46) and an arrowhead of copper (Dikshit, 2013. P. 24, Pl. 31; Sahu, 2013. P. 14–15, Fig. 12,1-2; Sahu, 2015. P. 22; Sahu, 2015. P. 206) were excavated from the deposits of the same Hakra Ware level. Copper beads were found in Mehrgarh in the last pre-ceramic layer (before 6000 BC) (Jarrige, 2008. P. 148 & 151). Circa 6100–6000 and 3600–3300 B.C. the glaciers of Tibet and the Himalayas slid into the valleys, "drove out" their inhabitants to the plains and launched a migration "domino". The formation of the main myth of the Rigveda therefore dates back to ~ 6000 B.C., and its final design – ~ 3300 B.C. (then it was used in the symbolic teaching of the Rishis). The interpretation of the main myth of the Rigveda as a natural process by P. T. Iyer and D. S. Chauhan passes from the category of interesting, but extravagant interpretations with incredible antiquity to the category of accurate descriptions of specific paleoecological events with scientific and supported by other evidence dating placing the material of the Rigveda at the turn of IV and III Millennia B.C. (Semenenko, 2016–2021). According to the first book of the Shahnameh (Firdousi, 1993), the ancestor of the Iranians Keyumars or Kiomars "high in the mountains... first he dwelt" (494). His grandson Hushang stroke the first fire on a mountain path, established its cult, discovered metals and created blacksmithing, invented a hoe, an axe and a saw, tamed bulls, donkeys and sheep, taught people draft farming, irrigation and hunting fur-bearing animals (637–704). "And everyone began to grow their own bread by themselves, stopped wandering through the steppes and forests. And before they got used to this kind of life, forest fruits were human food... the leaves alone served as clothing" (649–654). 1780 years after the death of Hushang, King Feriydun (=Traitaunas) had sons Salm (=Sarm=Sairima), Tur and Iraj (=Arya), who headed the Sarmatians (West), Turanians (East) and Iranians (Iran), respectively (807–2923). According to the first section of the Vendidad or Videvdat, "the best of the countries and habitats" is Airyanem Vaejah. It has ten winter and two summer months (in some manuscripts – seven winter months and five summer months), and "the waters are cold, the lands are cold, the plants are cold there in the middle of winter ... there winter [when] is coming to an end, there is a big flood". That is, the Proto-Iranians lived in a mountainous area with a long winter, an Alpine climate and powerful spring floods, which correspond to the highland valleys at the junction of the Himalayas and the Hindu Kush. This is consistent with the mention in the same list of first section of the Videvdat the Harayu=Sarayu, the Harahwaiti=Saraswati (the modern Sarsuti-Ghaggar-Hakra-Nara) and the Hapta Hendu=Sapta Sindhu (Seven Rivers) — rivers of the north-west of Hindustan (Avesta, 1997. P. 70–74). According to the second section of the Videvdat under Yima, every 300 years the "land was filled three times with small and large cattle, people, dogs, birds... Small and large cattle and people do not find a place."



Yima pushed the land apart each time after time by one third, two thirds and three thirds "more than before, and small and large cattle and people found shelter here." This is how one can describe the exit of the proto-Iranians from the mountain valleys of the Himalayas and the Hindu Kush to the plains due to overpopulation. After 900 years, Ahura Mazda in Airyanem Vaejah told Yima: "Winters will come, and from them a strong deadly cold... first, clouds of snow will snow on the highest mountains to the depth of Ardivi. The third part... of the cattle will stay alive in the most terrible places... on the tops of mountains or in river valleys in strong dwellings... Then, because of the melting of the snows, the waters will flow, and by a miracle... it will appear if they see anywhere the sheep's trail" (Avesta, 1997. P. 78–79). This is how climate change, precipitation regime and the flow of the Himalayan and Hindu Kush rivers can be described due to the growth of glaciers in 6100–6000 or 3600–3300 B.C.

The region at the junction of Hindustan and Iran is the world centre for the formation of rye, soft, dwarf and round-grain wheats, peas, lentils, chickpeas, chinas, carrots, turnips, flax and hemp (Vavilov, 1931; Vavilov, Bukinich, 1959). "Both in terms of climate, relief, and cultures, the north-western corner of India ... is one with Afghanistan... In the upper reaches of the Indus, in the Punjab – Five-Rivers' Land, a great variety of conditions from the limits of culture to the subtropics, and an abundance of water are concentrated at the same time... This area is amazing in terms of the diversity of conditions, the richness of the genes of cultivated plants, and the diversity of nationalities... Plants here are represented by low-cultural forms; people have worked with them a little, they retain the features of primitiveness... they were taken ready-made... The very small-fruited of Afghan and North Indian cultivated plants, which makes them closer to savages, involuntarily draws attention to itself... Coarse type of alfalfa, coarse varieties of melons, filmy grain of barley with an awn that is difficult to separate from the grain, hard-threshed dwarf wheat with coarse brittle awns, small-seeded black lentils, peas, rather similar to vetch, beans (*Vicia faba* L.), through the fineness of seeds resembling peas, low-sugar carrots – these are typical representatives of southeastern Afghanistan and adjacent Punjab and Kashmir... These facts, along with the presence of an amazing diversity, further testify to the primacy of this center of agrarian culture" (Vavilov, Bukinich, 1959. P. 201 & 362–364).

IV. CONCLUSION

Various data obtained by different scholarly disciplines such as glaciology, archaeology, botany, Indo-European studies, linguistics and mythology have made it possible to render anew the long ago proposed glacial interpretation of the main Rigveda myth of the solar god Indra's struggle with a mountain-like demon Vala and a rocky snake demon Vritra, the result of which is the release of the North-Western Hindustani streams (Sapta Sindhu or Seven Rivers) to flow freely to the Indian ocean. The analysis of 69 samples of soils buried in the moraines of Pakistan, India and Nepal dates the expansion of the glaciers of Tibet and the Himalayas back to ~6100–6000 and 3600–3300 (C14 calibrated) B.C. thus making the main Rigveda myth an accurate description of specific paleoecological events of the successive glacial transgressions and regressions in the region at the junction of Iran and South Asia evidenced by many generations of the (Pre-)Rigvedic seers in their mountainous shelters (Ashrams) in the Himalayas and the Hindu Kush. This supports the dating of the Rigveda between 3300 and 2600 B.C. and the localization of the Indo-European (at least Indo-Iranian) homeland in the mountainous valleys of Punjab – Kashmir – Pakistan – Afghanistan –Tajikistan – North-Eastern Iran.



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PHOTOGRAPHIC APPLICATIONS

Plate 1. Snake-like Baltoro Glacier of Pakistan. Wikipedia images.





Plate 2. Snake-like Godwin-Austen Glacier in the foreground leading towards Concordia where it meets the snake-like Upper Baltoro glacier (coming from top left) to form the main snake-like Baltoro glacier. Pakistan. Wikipedia images.





Plate 3. Snake-like Baltoro glacier, Pakistan. Wikipedia image.



Plate 4. Snake-like Barpu (Miar) Glacier of Pakistan. Wikipedia image.





Plate 5. Snake-like Barpu (Miar) Glacier of Pakistan. Wikipedia images.





Plate 6. Snake-like Khurdopin glacier, Pakistan. Wikipedia image.



Plate 7. Snake-like Passu glacier, Pakistan. Wikipedia image.





Plate 8. Snake-like Rakhiot Glacier, Pakistan. Wikipedia images.





Plate 9. Snake-like Kondus glacier, Pakistan. Wikipedia image.



Plate 10. Snake-like Minapin Glacier, Pakistan. Wikipedia image.





Plate 11. Snake-like Durung Drung glacier, Zanskar, Jammu & Kashmir, India. Wikipedia images.





Plate 12. Snake-like Durung Drung glacier, Zanskar, Jammu & Kashmir, India. Wikipedia image.





Plate 13. Snake-like Barpu (Miar) Glacier of Pakistan. Wikipedia image.



Plate 14. Snake-like Passu glacier, Pakistan. Wikipedia image.





ГЛЯЦИОЛОГИЧЕСКАЯ ИНТЕРПРЕТАЦИЯ ОСНОВНОГО МИФА РИГВЕДЫ И ПРОБЛЕМА ПРАРОДИНЫ ИНДОЕВРОПЕЙЦЕВ

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Аннотация

Статья посвящена изучению основного индоиранского мифа, зафиксированного в Ригведе, — мифа о борьбе между солнечным богом и горным змеем. Уже более столетия предлагалось интерпретировать битву между Индрой и Вала–Вритрой как гляциологическое событие, о котором свидетельствуют ведические провидцы, — последнюю серию голоценовой трансгрессии и регрессии статических горopodobных и особенно подвижных змеевидных ледников Гималаев и Гиндукуша. Научный подход требовал прочной базы фактических данных, чтобы превратить эту интерпретацию в научную теорию. Эта база была получена недавно путем анализа образцов почвы из-под морен Пакистана, Индии и Непала, датирующих две последние ледниковые трансгрессии Гималаев и Гиндукуша около 6100–6000 и 3600–3300 гг. до н.э. Эта датировка соответствует культурному словарю индоевропейцев, свидетельствам Авесты, археологии Южной Азии и аграрным особенностям региона Афганистан–Пенджаб–Кашмир, где был создан этот главный индоиранский миф. Таким образом, сочинение гимнов Ригведы между 3300 и 2600 годами до н. э. и локализация индоевропейской прародины на стыке Ирана и Индостана были ещё раз доказаны.

Ключевые слова: индоевропейцы, индоарии, иранцы, Ригведа, Авеста, ледники.